Nuggets of News

P.O. Box 26
Gold Hill, Ore. 97525

June, 1993

A permanent home for the Gold Hill Historical Society is a distinct possibility. We have been evicted from our present rented location and negotiations are in progress for the purchase of a First Avenue historic house.

At our March 17 meeting, members were informed that Gold Hill Video and our museum would probably be evicted and replaced by a convenience market. Upon confirmation of the rumor, the membership voted to search for a new site to rent or buy.

After inspecting many properties, including the old post office building, the space west of Maggie's Pizza, Dr. Lichtenstein's former office, the Spid Merriman house, the Daisy West house, Jill Martin's house and others, the GHHS Board of Directors discussed the financial possibility of purchasing one of the properties.

The decision was made to purchase a property. Jill Martin's house was preferred and on April 26, a final tour of her home at First Avenue and Fifth Street was made. That same evening a special meeting was called and the membership voted to proceed with negotiations to purchase the early 1900 home, which sits on a 100'X100' lot.

The Martin house is in excellent condition. There will be some repairs and alterations, handicap ramp, paint and minor carpentry work. Hopefully, our next newsletter will inform you of OUR museum.

Incidentally, our artifacts and supplies are being stored in three locations. We would like your help moving them(hopefully for the last time) as early as July. Call Marge Martin, Ted Wharton, or Clare Moore.

Our next monthly meeting will be held on June 16 (Wednesday), 7:00 at Lynn and Rex Parkers house, 14693 Highway 234 (1/4 mile beyond the little league field). We are pleased to see that interest in the Society continues its steady growth. More members regularly attend meetings and over 100 families are listed on our membership roster.

In our March edition of Nuggets of News, we highlighted the Sesquicentennial Celebration of the Oregon Trail. The current interest in the Trail is also resulting in families re-examining their own genealogical "trails." If you have been sleuthing the identities of those people in old family albums with no names on the back or are curious to know about ancestors who may have travelled the Oregon Trail, you may be interested in attending a workshop in Portland in late September, entitled "Family Trails." For further information, contact:

Genealogical Society of Oregon
P.O. Box 15169
Portland, Oregon 97215

The following article is credited to Gene Luckey, editor of Harney Historical Highlights, the newsletter of the Harney County Historical Society in Burns. The article was selected to remind you of the incredible hardship and grief experienced by the immigrants into the Oregon Country, as well as the fear and desperation felt by the Native Americans who witnessed wave after wave of settlers seeking new land. We hope you will be touched by "Suffer the Little Children."

SUFFER THE LITTLE CHILDREN
by Eugene E. Luckey

The way west by wagon train was not only difficult, but it was extremely dangerous. Danger came in many forms, gunshot wounds, unruly horses and cattle, disease, drowning, and starvation, to name a few. It has been estimated that between 35,000 and 45,000 died on the covered wagon trail west. A grave for every 80 yards of trail from the Missouri River to the Willamette. The flood of westward emigrants started in 1842 when 112 persons left Independence, Missouri, for Oregon. It continued until the early 1900's with most of the early pioneers making the trip between 1842 and 1870.

Indians along the Oregon trail seldom killed until the 1860's, when the Indian finally realized that the white man was coming into his country in never-ending numbers and his way of life and livelihood was threatened. The following is an account of one of the most terrible experiences ever encountered by an Oregon-bound wagon train.

In the late summer of 1860, a wagon train consisting of eight wagons and 54 persons left Ft. Hall, Idaho, led by William Utter (Otter) and escorted by Colonel Howe and twenty-one dragoons.

Joseph Myers and his wife, the former Mary E. Prime, and their five children, Margaret, Eugene, Hattie, Isabella (age 10) and Carrier, had left their home in Wisconsin in the spring and joined the train bound for the Willamette Valley. They were accompanied by several of their neighbors from Geneva, Wisconsin.

The train had with it the customary cattle and spare oxen which the older children drove along behind the company. Colonel Howe had deployed his dragoons approximately 100 yards out from either side of the train with four soldiers riding ahead as scouts. The women drove the wagons and the men walked alongside the oxen encouraging them onward with whip and rocks thrown at their flanks. The terrain was mostly gentle rolling hills, there was little or no trees or brush. Mostly it was stunted sagebrush growing in rocky volcanic soil.

The train traveled slowly, averaging two miles an hour which was an average speed for a typical train with wagons and livestock.

The morning air was still cool as it was approaching fall, but as the sun rose in the sky, it began to warm rapidly. Dust rose from the animals hooves and the wagon wheels. It was swirled around by gentle gusty winds to settle on everything outside and inside the wagons.

Colonel Howe would occasionally ride from the head of his troops to the head of the wagon train and converse briefly with the wagonmaster to determine where and when they would "noon" or where they would camp for the night.

At night, the settlers would circle their wagons in a wide circle, so that the soldiers could come inside and spend the night within the confines of the wagon's enclosure. Cooking fires were small and quickly allowed to go out, as there was little fuel to keep them burning.

After the fires had burned out and the sun set, everyone started putting on more clothing as it cooled quickly after nightfall.

After the train and soldiers had traveled six days west of Ft. Hall, Colonel Howe called a conference for the men on the train and said, "Men--the army has been patrolling the area around Raft river and the California trail south. There doesn't seem to be any hostile Indian activity. Soldiers from Oregon have also been patrolling their part of the trail during the summer. I believe that you will be all right from here on westward, so we will leave you now. Good luck and God speed."

(The Colonel knew that the Oregon Department had troops patrolling in the vicinity of Boise during the summer and believed that the trail southward to California was the most dangerous. This was indeed the case, as Colonel Wright, of the Oregon Department had reported to his headquarters, September 20th, that the

"routes of immigration were rendered perfectly safe" by the operation of troops during the summer. Major Grier's command which had been patrolling on the road to Boise during the summer had just returned to Walla Walla in September. The members of the train also might have believed that troops in old Fort Boise offered some protection from Indians by their presence, but that place had been deserted in 1854.)

The people of the train thanked the Colonel and his soldiers for offering them protection. Good-byes were expressed and the soldiers rode off toward Ft. Hall.

The Wagonmaster William Utter elected to take the train westward by the "dry-route" south of the Snake River, but still following the well-worn trail of the many parties who had gone before. The wagon train continued on westward, at 12 to 15 miles a day.

The train camped at Sinker Creek on September 9th. The next morning, Vanorman, the leader for the day, tied his fine black stallion behind his lead wagon for the days journey. People and animals were bone-tired from the continual traveling, as they had been on the trail since June. Each man, woman, and child, looked eagerly forward to reaching Oregon, where they could finally get a long rest.

On the morning of the 13th of September, between 9 and 10 o'clock, approximately 100 Indians accompanied by a number of barking, mongrel dogs, attacked the company of emigrants. They rode in fast, yelling like demons, as they surrounded the train trying to stampede the cattle so they could steal them. The people of the train were faced with two tasks, to corral their animals and to prepare to defend themselves against the sudden attack.

The men and older children got the cattle under control quickly and the company made preparations to fight. When the Indians saw this, they made signs of friendship and of being hungry. The pioneers believed that further trouble might be averted if they gave them food, so they allowed the Indians to come in closer and gave them presents of food. After eating, the Indians allowed the train to continue peacefully on its way.

The Indians then rode out ahead of the train and again attacked it from over the brow of a rolling hill. This time, they sent many arrows into the wagons, horses, and cattle, hoping once more to stampede the livestock. The train drove on to the foot of a hill, where the Indians surrounded them and began firing guns, killing first, Louis Lawson, who was driving the last wagon, then fell William Ottley and Charles Ishnell.(The site of this battle was later determined to be on Castle Creek hear Castle Rock.)

The men circled the eight wagons and piled supplies between the wagons so they could fight from behind the improvised breastworks. All day long, the Indians circled the embattled defenders, their rifle fire was mostly inaccurate and did little harm except to agitate the horses and cattle, who were already near uncontrollable for lack of food and water. The children were also very thirsty, so some cows were milked and given to the babies and the smaller children.

The battle continued for the remainder of the day and several Indians were killed by the defenders. At dusk Judson Cressey was mortally wounded. The 21 children huddled in the wagons screaming and crying from fear. One painted-faced Indian slit the canvas of a wagon filled with women and children only to have Emeline Trimble grab an axe and split his skull.

Mrs. Joseph Myers took her feather beds and fastened them to the canvas cover of a wagon. Arrows could not completely penetrate the soft material, but it was terrible hot that day and the additional covering prevented air circulation, making the inside of the wagn almost unbearable.

All night long, the Indians fired random shots and at dawn of the second day of the attack, they charged, but were driven off. The battle continued for another day in which another white man was killed.

Towards sunset, the members of the train gathered together for a conference and they agreed that they should leave four wagons to the Indians, hoping that they were more interested in property than their lives. The Indians agreed to let the emigrants go on after leaving four wagons. The men rearranged the wagon loads, the oxen were hitched to the remaining four wagons, and the train started westward again, followed by a few Indians who were apparently more interested in taking lives than whatever was left to them in the wagons.

The Indians were apparently not satisfied with their booty and once more attacked the emigrants. The drovers in the company tried to keep the livestock moving ahead, but in spite of their best efforts, the hungry creatures would stop and snatch a mouthful of food. This made travel agonizingly slow.

With the train were four young men--Snyder, Chambourg, Chaffey and Murdoch--army deserters from Ft. Hall. They were well armed with rifles and revolvers belonging to the train. They were mounted on good horses and instructed to ride ahead and keep the trail open. Instead of doing their duty and assisting in protecting the company, they fled with the horses and the arms. Murdoch and Chombourg were later to report that the other two were killed, however conflicting information stated that Chaffey and Snyder got away from the Indians, but the other two were killed.

There were two German brothers in the company, by the name of Jake and Joe Reith, who had been driving wagons for their board. they volunteered to leave the train and go for help on foot. They were eventually successful, reaching the military authorities at Umatilla, Oregon, on October 2.

The emigrants crept along at a slow pace with the remaining four heavily loaded wagons, even though still under sporadic attack by the Indians, who continued to trail them. The Indians knew that they could stay out of range of settlers rifles and kill them one by one, as killing opportunities were presented. The children huddled down in the wagon beds and cried in fear as they jolted and bounced along the rough trail. Fear for the children's safety froze in each mother's breast as they tried to comfort them. Fear, anger, and hope, were with each man, as he tried to hurry his wagon forward in the ruts of the trail. Each man hoped that the Indians would eventually tire of their murderous pursuit of the train and ride off.

The traveling attack continued until the train stopped and another conference held. It was decided that because of their slow pace, they should abandon the remainder of the wagons and cattle. And if at all possible, to save their lives. the savages attacked again and the settlers salvaged a few things from the wagons and proceeded on foot. As soon as they were away from the protection of the wagons, two persons, John Myers and Susan Utter were shot dead. Mr. Utter, Father of Susan, then made signs of peace, but was shot while proposing a treaty. Mrs. Utter refused to leave her dead husband and she along with her boy and two of her girls were killed.

Eleven persons had now been killed, six others had left the train and there remained 37 men, women and children.

By walking all night and hiding under the bank of the river during the day, they eluded the trailing Indians. A loaf of bread which Mrs. Chase had saved from the abandoned wagons didn't last long. The men had some fish-hooks and the women had some thread which they fashioned into fishing lines. They came upon a dead cow and saved the putrid meat to eat.

While hiding out during the day, they could still hear the Indians prowling about, so they traveled only at night, which was a nightmare, as they stumbled and fell against sharp volcanic rocks which shredded their footwear and opened ugly wounds in their flesh. After they had traveled about seventy miles, the men became too weak to carry the children. The children would cry from hunger and pain, and the adults would

try to keep them quiet by cajolery and sometimes by force, for fear they would give away their position to the Indians.

The two dogs owned by Alex Vanorman were following them, so they killed them for food and for fear that the dogs might give away their hiding places. They built a small fire one night, and cooked and eat every scrap of meat from the dogs. Joseph Myers later killed a rattlesnake and they ate it.

In hiding near the present Homedale, the frightened survivors saw approximately 200 Indians cross the snake River. The feathered chief was mounted on Vanorman's fine, black, stallion. The stolen livestock was being driven behind him, some with arrows protruding from their ribs.

The bedraggled party finally came to the Owyee River and could go on no longer. They made camp and tried to build some wickiups to protect them from the weather.

They subsisted on a few wild berries and an occasional frog, rabbit and even an owl. They had guns, but could find no game.

While at the Owyee River camp they found a camp of Indians on the Snake River and they exchanged some articles of clothing and ammunition for some salmon.

In that final camp on the Owyee, were Alexis Vanorman, Mrs Vanorman, Mark Vanorman, Mr. & Mrs. Chase, Daniel and Albert Chase, Elizabeth and Susan Trimble, Samuel Gleason, Charles and Henry Utter and an infant child of the murdered Mrs. Utter, Joseph Myers, Mrs. Myers and five yount children, Margaret, Eugene, Isabella Hattie, and Carrie. Christopher Trimble, several children of Mrs. Chase, including Daniel and Albert, who later died of starvation and the five children of Mr. Vanorman.

It was decided that they would try once more, to send word of their plight and try to get help. Christopher Trimble, a boy of eleven, and old man, named Civilian G. Munson, were selected to go for help. They took whatever food could be spared and set out northward, hoping to find the trail again. They found the trail, and proceeded north-northwest until they reached Burnt River, near the present town of Durkee, Oregon. On reaching that place, they found the Reith brothers and Chaffey, one of the deserting soldiers who had gotten lost and wandered around in the wilderness, until he finally found his way back to the road.

Old man Munson went with these men to Umatilla, Oregon, where they arrived on the 2nd of October. They reported the plight of the massacre survivors to Indian Agent, Byron N. Davis, who immediately dispatched two men with a horse load of provisions to find the survivors as quickly as possible. At the same time a loaded wagon, drawn by oxen, was also sent out from the Agency.

Young Trimble did not go on with the men to Umatilla, instead, he returned to the emigrant camp from Burnt River. He wanted to offer hope to the survivors that help was on its way. He found that they were still without sustenance, but were keeping themselves alive with frogs that they caught crawling along the river.

During the next few days, the Indians camped nearby made several visits to the emigrants camp where they traded food for guns and clothing.

Alarmed lest the savages strip him of all his clothing and end by killing him, Alexis Vanorman set out to the north, hoping to meet the relief party, if one was coming. He was accompanied by his wife and five of his children. All of their bodies were later found at Burnt River, murdered by savages. Mrs. Vanorman had been scalped. There were reports that the four children were taken captive and some attempts at finding them were made later, but the children were never seen again.

At the Owyee camp, Mr. Chase died from eating salmon which he was too weak to digest. Elizabeth Trimble died of starvation, followed by her sister, Susan. Then Daniel and Albert Chase died of starvation.

Young Trimble had been in the habit of visiting the Indian camp and one day he returned to the emigrant camp with some Indians having salmon to sell. As Trimble was about to accompany the Indians back to their village, Myers asked,"Tell me how to find the trail to the Indians camp in case the soldiers come to our relief, we shall want to send for you." At the mention of "soldiers" the Indians began to show fear. It was an unfortunate utterance, as the Indians never returned to the emigrants camp. When the Indians were sought by others, they fled, leaving the body of the Trimble boy, whom they had murdered.

The condition of the still living within the emigrants camp was becoming more and more critical. Deaths were occurring regularly and subsistence had become non-existent. At length, after a unanimous decision reached in consultation, and prayer, it was decided that the living were compelled to eat the bodies of the dead. The bodies of four children were first consumed and eaten sparingly to make the hated food last as long as it might. There finally came a time, when thebody of Mr. Chase was exhumed and prepared for eating. Before it could be tasted, a relief party led by Lieutenant Anderson rode into the pitiful camp followed by Captain Dent with 100 soldiers.

This was 45 days after the initial wagon train attack on the Snake River. When the troops came into the camp of misery, they wept. They thought Captain Dent was cruel to prevent them from scattering food amont the half naked living skeletons stretched on the ground, but he knew that too much food would make the starving people ill or maybe kill them.

They eventually made some coffee and soup and let the survivors eat every two hours.

The Myers family, Mrs. Chase and one child and Mr. Trimble were all that were alive at the camp. Murdoch and Chaffee were also rescued from a small branch of the Burnt River, almost naked, without fire, and starving.

When Captain Dent reached the Blue Mountains with the survivors, the mountains were already covered with snow. Had they arrived a little later, snow would have prevented their return to the Umatilla, where they arrived on October 31st.

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